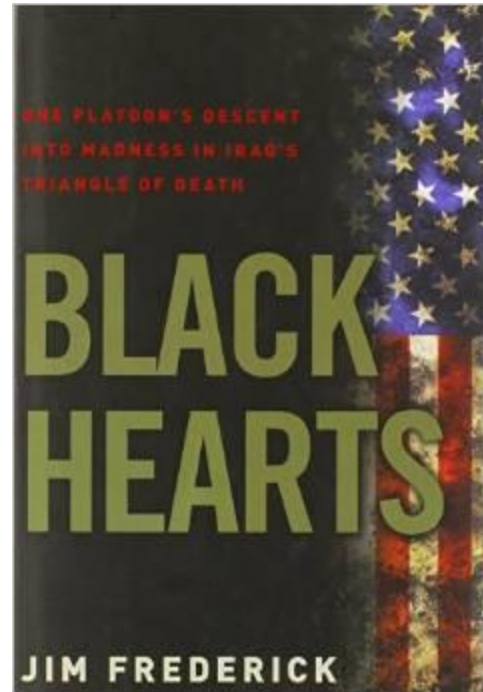


Black Hearts
One Platoon's Descent into Madness in
Iraq's triangle of Death
Jim Frederick (2011)

Book's Premise: Frederick describes the disturbing transformation of 1st Platoon, B Company, 1-502nd Infantry, 101st Airborne Division during a deployment to Iraq in 2006. During the deployment, the discipline and morality of the platoon eroded to the point where four Soldiers left a traffic control point, raped a young Iraqi girl and murdered her and her family. The lack of discipline also resulted in three other Soldiers from the platoon being overrun, captured, and killed by insurgents at a remote checkpoint. Frederick describes the apathetic and destructive command climates at company and battalion level and how those contributed to the erosion of good order and discipline in the platoon and enabled an environment of substance abuse, fear, and despair.



Key Takeaways: Leaders matter. Without strong leadership during the tough conditions of combat, the Soldiers of 1st Platoon lost their military discipline and even their basic decency. The Soldiers of adjacent platoons, companies, and battalions faced similar conditions, but did not degrade in the same manner due to the constant efforts of their leaders. In 1st Platoon, the “perfect storm” of a toxic battalion commander, apathetic company commander, and constantly changing and ineffective platoon leadership created conditions where Soldiers could contemplate and commit heinous crimes.

Best Quote: “Now one thing that was absent was if Colonel Kink had gotten up there and said “I fucked up too. I have allowed you guys to turn into monsters. And I had completely forsaken you when you needed the support that only I had the power to provide. But I lacked the character to do it. All of you have failed. Me, and we, as a family, as 1st Battalion, Bravo Company, 1st Platoon, all the way down the line, have failed. At some point we failed to have the character to make the right decisions to make it so that this never happened. Mine was the crowning failure, but not the only one.” If, at any point, that would have come out of his mouth, a lot of people would have snapped out of it, like that. But nobody’s got the grit to say that. Everybody wants to say, “But it wasn’t my fault.” Including him.” – SGT John Diem

Why It's Important: The point of military ethics and professionalism is to serve our Nation with honor. This catastrophic failure in leadership and ethics is a clarion call to reflect upon our profession and our military family and to do better.